



*State of Washington
Department of
Labor and Industries*

PROVIDER BULLETIN

Published by Health Services Analysis Section • Olympia, Washington 98504-4322

PB 95-08

THIS ISSUE

Introducing the Center of Excellence for Chemically Related Illness

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CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHEMICALLY RELATED ILLNESS OPENED AUGUST 31, 1995, AT HARBORVIEW IN SEATTLE

The Department of Labor and Industries, with the participation of the Department of Health, has contracted with the University of Washington's Occupational and Environmental Medicine Clinic at Harborview Medical Center to establish and operate a Center of Excellence for Chemically Related Illness (CRI). The Center opened August 31, 1995. Chemically related illness refers to a wide variety of health problems caused by exposure to occupational and environmental chemicals. The Center combines research, educational programs and clinical care for people exposed to chemicals.

The Center is the result of Washington State legislation passed in 1994. Collaborative efforts between the Department of Labor and Industries, the Department of Health, and the Occupational and Environmental Medicine Program led to the design and implementation of the Center, as envisioned by the legislature. The Occupational and Environmental Medicine Clinic at Harborview is part of the Occupational and Environmental Medicine Program at the University of Washington, founded in 1981. It is a joint program of the Department of Medicine and the Department of Environmental Health of the School of Public Health and Community Medicine.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

The CRI Center has affiliated with satellite clinics to provide comprehensive access to care for patients throughout the state of Washington. Occupational Medical Associates in Spokane and the Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic in Toppenish will provide service to patients in eastern and central Washington. Through funding provided by the legislature, the Center is in the process of equipping a mobile laboratory to provide on-site environmental evaluations.

The Department of Labor and Industries has taken a leading role among the nation's worker's compensation insurers in research on CRI. A special claims unit within the department reviews and processes all work related claims associated with CRI. As with any claim filed by an injured worker in Washington, the exposure must have occurred at the workplace and objective medical evidence is necessary for approval of benefits.

ASSESSMENTS

The Center offers the ability to complete a routine or complex CRI assessment depending on the needs of the patient. Comprehensive industrial hygiene assessment and testing are also available. For L&I patients, some procedures require pre-authorization by the claim manager. Staff at the Center will secure the needed pre-authorization for procedures. Patients not covered by Labor and Industries may seek assessment by obtaining a referral to the Center from their personal physician.

REFERRALS

Physicians should call (206) 223-3005 to refer patients to the Center. Claim Managers from the Department of Labor and Industries will also refer workers with possible CRI to the Center. The general community are welcome to call (206) 223-3005 for information about an appointment.

OBJECTIVES

The Occupational and Environmental Medicine Clinic at Harborview established the following objectives for the Chemically Related Illness Center. They are:

Clinical Care

- Provide diagnosis and treatment for patients with potential chemically-related illness
- Provide in-depth medical, psychological, biochemical and other medical evaluations and exposure assessment
- Develop clinical practice guidelines
- Assist with return to work by making recommendations for appropriate protective equipment and work site modifications

Research

- Create a registry of patients with chemically-related illness
- Identify patients for clinical characterization
- Link with the chemically-related illness claim unit at the Department of Labor and Industries and databases at the Department of Health for coordination of registry data
- Analyze and develop draft guidelines for diagnosis of chemically-related illness, attribution to exposures, impairment assessment and, when indicated, disability awards.
- Identify patients to assess diagnostic modalities, in order to conduct randomized treatment trials and to provide patient access to investigational mechanisms.
- Contribute to peer review and scientific literature.

Education and Public Information

- Implement a public process which seeks input and provides external reviews and an interactive process of public education on the major clinical, scientific, social and economic issues surrounding chemically-related illness
- Facilitate public policy to minimize long-term disability through education
- Identify the diversity of opinion with respect to chemically-related illness.
- Facilitate dialog and education on chemically-related illness.
- Provide specific assistance and training for Labor and Industries claim managers, Department of Health Officials, other public agencies, health care providers and the community on chemically-related illness.
- Through a broad advisory board, provide guidance to the Center on setting priorities for clinical care, research and public education.

CONTACTS

For more information about the CRI Center contact:

Clinical Issues or Referrals - Occupational & Environmental Medicine Program
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